

PRELIMINARY REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT COMMISSIONERS FOR IRELAND.

Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty.

Sir,

January 1, 1880.

In accordance with the instructions contained in your communication of the 9th November 1878, we submit for the consideration of His Grace, the President of the Royal Agricultural Commission, the following preliminary report:—

We commenced our inquiries in Kerry in September.

We have since travelled several thousand miles, and been through several counties in each of the four provinces of Ireland.

In each district we have endeavoured to confer with landed proprietors, land agents, farmers, merchants, traders, and others who could give us any useful information or put us in the way of getting it. We have been over several hundred farms, and made as minute inquiries as possible into the circumstances of their occupants.

We had not proceeded far when we discovered that the agricultural classes of Ireland are passing through a depression of great intensity.

As we proceeded through the remote districts of the west it became evident to us that widespread distress will soon prevail among the small farmers and cottiers. We saw with our own eyes that the supply of turf saved is unusually small, and that in many places the potato, which is still the mainstay of a large proportion of the people, was so light and blighted that it would run short about Christmas, and in some places sooner.

The tales told us by the small farmers as to their indebtedness seemed so incredible that we took the trouble wherever we could to verify them by reference to the books of shopkeepers.

In a few instances we found they understated the sums they owed; and in no case have we been able to detect wilful exaggeration. This may seem strange to many intelligent persons whose knowledge of the Irish people has been derived from hearsay. We have been forced to conclude, from actual knowledge and observation, that few have taken the trouble to acquire a thorough knowledge of the true feelings and wants of the small farmers who form so notable a factor in the political and social condition of the country.

In many districts we have gone together from farm to farm, and from house to house, and told the people frankly and plainly the object of our mission. Notwithstanding that the country has been excited by agitation we have been well received everywhere. The fact of our having been sent by Parliament and the Government to the very homes of the people to ascertain their real condition seemed to us to inspire new hopes and aspirations in the minds of many of them.

In many cases we found that the real condition of the small farmers in the south and west is not known to their landlords, or to the land agents, or to the very bailiffs on the estates we have examined.

Further inquiries have revealed to us that a large portion of the people in many parts of the country are in a critical state. In the south and west and even in parts of the north a very large number of the small farmers, cottiers, and even labourers have lived during the summer, that is after the potato had been used, on food obtained on credit.

At the commencement of this credit system it was customary to pay the debts thus contracted after harvest. In good years credit was freely given not only for meal and flour but for clothes and other articles. A succession of bad harvests has prevented them from paying up their accounts regularly. In this way debts have accumulated until many of the small farmers have come to owe to the shopkeepers and others four, five, six, and even ten times the amount of their annual rent.

In many cases they have been charged an usurious rate of interest. We have got the most conclusive evidence that the banks have generally charged on small farmers' bills, which are usually for small sums, 10 per cent. per annum. Private money-lenders, who are numerous in remote districts, and make advances freely to small farmers and cottiers, charge a still higher rate of interest. In the west a vile code of usury has been practised under the title of the "gombeen" system, which has pressed with unusual severity on the people. We have got full information regarding it from the people themselves. We have interviewed several men who have made the advances. We are, therefore, in a position to speak authoritatively regarding the system.

We shall briefly state the result of the examination of the books, papers, &c. of one of these gentlemen, who lives in a small town in the west, which is in the centre of an extensive small farm district. At the time of our visit he had some 500 I O U's for 1*l*. 1*s*. 11*d*. each, that sum being fixed upon to enable him to obtain decrees from the petty sessions in the town. Basing our calculations on his own statement, the rate of interest he charges is 43½ per cent. per annum. But he keeps a whisky and

* This word seems to be indigenous to Connaught; of the three Irish dictionaries we have examined, it occurs only in one.

† This has been verified by an eminent mathematician, Professor Daniel O'Sullivan, Ph. D., of the National Board.

Ireland. According to the last census, we had then in the country 592,590 holdings, of which there were :—

Not exceeding 1 acre	-	-	-	-	48,448
Above 1 and not exceeding 5 acres	-	-	-	-	74,899
" 5	"	15	"	-	171,883
" 15	"	30	"	-	138,647
					<hr/>
					433,287
Above 30 acres	-	-	-	-	159,303
					<hr/>
					592,590

This table shows that we had upwards of 400,000 holdings under 30 acres, which in England would be considered small farms. We had close on 300,000, not one of which exceeds 15 acres, and upwards of 150,000, not one of which exceeds 5 acres. If we take the Government valuation as a standard we find there are upwards of 300,000 holdings in Ireland under 8*l.* valuation, and there are upwards of 120,000 more between 8*l.* and 15*l.* valuation.

Even these figures will not adequately represent the state of the case. On one estate in Connaught which we have visited there are 3,500 tenants, not one of whom pays as much as 4*l.* a year rent. On another estate in the same county the average rental is about 2*l.* per tenant. In that county there are 19,000 holdings under 4*l.* valuations. In the county Donegal there are 17,000, and in the county Galway another 17,000 of the same class.

We have already visited hundreds of these farms, and found the occupants of a large number of them in so deplorable a condition that we feel unable to describe it in a way which would enable His Grace to realise it fully. Over and over again we found the dwellings to contain only one apartment, in which were frequently housed cattle or pigs and sometimes both.

In several other dwellings in county Mayo we have found the manure in the middle of the solitary apartment. The land is wretchedly farmed. Indeed the agricultural practices in remote districts and the social condition of the people are as low as they could possibly be.

The figures already quoted will enable His Grace to form a tolerably correct notion of the extent to which this state of things prevails.

The census returns throw additional light upon the subject.

According to these returns there were 155,675 mud cabins in Ireland with only one apartment, and these were occupied by 227,579 families.

While the agricultural depression has seriously affected every class in Ireland, it has told with terrific effect on the small farmers now under consideration, and, if possible, still more terrifically on a numerous class in Ireland who live partly by the cultivation of small holdings and partly by farm labour, fishing, &c. We cannot give a better illustration of this class than by referring to the fact that on a well-known estate in County Sligo, which is managed under the immediate supervision of the proprietor, a man much respected, there are 94 tenants and 98 cottiers, in all 192 families, numbering 1,152 human beings, trying to live on 329 acres of land. The greater number of these people are in want of relief.

This state of things prevails in many places along the seaboard of the west.

In the inland small-farm districts of Connaught and parts of Ulster a very large number of the small farmers have made it a practice to go to England as labourers every year. They have come back and paid their rent and even shop debts with the money thus earned. Owing to the depression, very few of these were able to save anything in England last year.

The agent on one extensive estate in the west told us that the money brought back from England in this way often exceeded the rental.

We cannot too strongly condemn the system on the ground that the farms of the poor people are neglected for months. The land is, as a rule, not yielding one half the produce which it would yield under proper cultivation. And the most unsatisfactory circumstance of all is that neither the habits nor tone of the people has been improved by residence in England where they come into contact with the lowest class.

The gentry and their agents say so. The bishops and clergy, whom we have found most willing and anxious to facilitate our inquiries, say that this wandering unsettled sort of life has not improved the people themselves or the tone of opinion in these districts. And judging by our own independent observations we are bound to say we think they form the most dissatisfied section of the farming classes. As long as these people get high wages in England they work hard there for some months in summer and autumn.

They look upon their little farms and houses as roosts for the winter and spring. Formerly they subdivided and re-subdivided to a ruinous extent.

In many cases the subdivision took place under old leases in which it was not usual to insert clauses against sub-letting. Many of the needy small proprietors, too, encouraged the system, because these poor people paid for the roosts sums which in themselves were small, but which on the land they occupied (generally bog or rough and stony upland) has been more than could possibly be paid for it in large holdings.

We have now given a very concise and, we fear, inadequate outline of the state of affairs brought to light by the present crisis.

The labourers have cried out for help throughout the country. Many of the gentry have begun relief works.

The cottiers and poorest grade of small farmers have also cried out for aid in several places; and as soon as the potato runs short, this cry will become very general.

It would be interesting to point out the extent to which the failure of this crop, and the partial

failure of other crops, together with the fall in prices, have affected the agricultural interests of Ireland this year; but if we dwell upon these topics in this report it would become inconveniently long.

The Royal Agricultural Commission was appointed for the purpose of inquiring into the general agricultural depression, for investigating the causes which have produced it, and for suggesting remedies. At the time, no one, as far as we are aware, expected that starvation would appear in Ireland this winter.

Those who have paid special attention to the social condition of Ireland may have dreaded the pressure of the time; but when the Commission was appointed, no one expected anything approaching to a famine.

It is evident from what we have advanced that lives would be lost if the Government, the gentry, and others took no steps to avert such a calamity.

The Government have already passed a minute which is intended to facilitate the loan of public money to landed proprietors for employing small farmers and agricultural labourers in the drainage and improvement of land. We hope the terms will soon be made more liberal.

And we are fully convinced that something more must be done.

Our inquiries in the south and west, and in parts of Ulster, such as Donegal and the south of Armagh, have brought out one consideration of the most serious magnitude and importance to which we wish to invite attention at once; namely, that unless something be done to relieve the districts which are over-populated of their surplus population, distress and famine must occur periodically in these districts. Emigration is probably the remedy which will first suggest itself. Emigration or colonisation is the natural means of disposing of the surplus population, and of preventing excessive subdivision, of an agricultural country, the soil of which is well cultivated. But the soil of Ireland, more especially in the south and west, is not well cultivated. One of us has often exposed the defects of Irish farming. They need not be repeated in this place.

It has been shown that there are six million acres of land comparatively worthless because it is surcharged with water. The judicious drainage of this land would repay the outlay in a short time, and increase the produce of the country. The greater part of this land, and large tracts of other lands, are now bearing poor, unwholesome herbage, and ought to be broken up, renovated, and either put under "mixed husbandry," or relaid down to grass in good condition. We are enabled to state, as the result of many years' experience and observation, that vast tracts of these lands have been so neglected for years that they are going backwards. The improved herbage resulting from drainage alone would increase their productive power to the extent of at least fifty per cent.

Under a proper system of mixed husbandry the gross yield would be increased at least threefold.

Now these lands are, at present, waste or semi-waste. In face of this state of things, which we have seen and carefully examined, it occurs to us to suggest whether it may not be wise to buy up portions of these lands from the proprietors, and to place upon the portions so purchased, the surplus small farmers and their families.

We do not suggest that the State should embark in any scheme of land reclamation. Our suggestion is that the State should cure a deep-seated evil, and give a new direction to the thoughts and feelings of this class. For obvious reasons we do not encumber this report with details of our views.

In our travels we have heard many gentlemen express their surprise that recent legislation, and notably the Land Act of 1870, has failed to allay agitation or discontent in Ireland. In our next report we shall go very fully into the working of the Land Act.

Here we shall only remark that its authors did not possibly notice the evil to which we have now drawn attention, and, if they did, the remedy they proposed has been an utter failure.

In support of our own view of the case we may mention that we have been able to trace a connexion between the present agitation and the excessive subdivision of the land to which we have drawn attention.

Monster meetings have been held at Ballyhaunis and Ballaghaderreen. These places may be described as two "head centres" of subdivision. In ordinary times a great many of the small farmers near these towns are scarcely above want; and, after a few hard years, they are on the verge of starvation and rebellion.

A meeting was held at Gorteen in county Sligo, at which speeches were made which led to prosecutions. That meeting was mainly supported by the class of which we write.

Meetings were held at Tubbercurry and Deemore West in the same county; at Westport, Castlebar, Balin, and other places, all of which were fed from the same source.

Numerous suggestions have been propounded for remedying this and other evils in this country.

Among those remedies the foremost place in popular esteem, and even in the opinion of prominent public men, must be given to the establishment of peasant proprietors.

Some contend for an expansion of the "Bright clauses" of the Land Act.

Under these clauses upwards of 800 peasant proprietors have been established in nine years, or less than 100 per annum. The process is so slow that it seems to be out of the range of any practical cure of the existing state of things.

Others have been pointing to what they call the extraordinary success of the Commissioners of Irish Church Temporalities in creating peasant proprietors. The evidence given before the select committees of the House of Commons, of which Mr. Shaw Lefevre was chairman, induced many people to look hopefully to the results of the labours of that Commission.

The condition of the peasant proprietors so created forms part of the schedule in which our duties have been laid down.

For this preliminary report we advisedly selected the lands sold to occupying tenants in the county Armagh, the small farmers of which have long been proverbial for their industry and thrift.

We have visited every holding sold in two districts in that county, and made as careful inquiry as we could into all the circumstances of their occupants. We now state the naked facts as far as they have come to our knowledge.

We take the holdings in the order in which we visited them.

The first district examined was Ballintemple, and the first holding reached was that of No. 1, who purchased in April, 1875. He died in August, 1879. The holding contains 5a. 1r. 30p.; the rent was 6l. 2s. 8d., and the Government valuation is 6l.

He had to sell his live stock to pay the instalment, and not a beast of any kind, except two small pigs, was on the land at the time of our visit, which was wholly unexpected.

Before the purchase he used to keep four cows. He had also built a good house before the purchase. The windows and general appearance of it now tell their own tale of pecuniary embarrassment and distress.

No. 2 purchased at the same time as No. 1. The holding contains 9a. 5r. 30p.; the rent was 12l. 5s. 8d.; the Government valuation 9l.

The purchase-money was 185l., of which 54l. 5s. 8d. was paid down. Two cows were sold to make up part of this sum, and the remainder was borrowed from a local attorney at a high rate of interest. The cows have not been replaced ever since.

No live stock was on the farm but few. This year 5½ acres have been under oats, the greater portion of which has been sold to make up half an instalment. The area under potatoes has been 1a. 2r., and the crop has been so bad that none is left. The rest of the land has been let as "grazing" for 4l.

This poor woman says she has been ruined by the purchase. Between interest and instalments she has been paying upwards of double the old rent in addition to the whole of the rates.

No. 3 and his wife were in Newry when we called. The next house is occupied by No. 4, who is in England at present. We saw his wife, and her five children, who do not go to school for want of decent clothing, and who now go to the mountain for fuel, which is the only fuel available. The holding contains seven acres; the rent was 4l. 1s.; the valuation 4l. 10s.; the purchase-money was 76l., of which one half was borrowed from friends, and of this less than one half has been paid back. The second half must be paid soon; and the poor woman has no hope whatever that it will be forthcoming, or that they can hold their ground. This year earnings have been bad in England.

Three weeks ago she got 15s. from her husband, which went to pay part of the debts owing to pressing shopkeepers. The house, which is in a miserable state, consists of a kitchen and bedroom; the rain comes through the roof of the latter. The poor woman regrets latterly they ever purchased, and alleges, as a reason for doing so, that they were afraid the land would be bought up by a bad landlord.

There is not the slightest sign of improved cultivation in any of the foregoing holdings. The owners pay income tax and the whole of the rates.

On the last-mentioned holding there is a cow and calf; but the woman says that if pressed for the balance of the money borrowed to pay the first moiety of the purchase, this cow must be sold. Of oats there is left one small stack. There have been three rods of potatoes which have failed.

No. 5, who lives on the hill side and whose house is approached by a bad bridle road, holds 11 acres, rough and smooth, of which the valuation is 4l.; the rent used to be 3l. 4s. 4d.; and the purchase-money was 84l., the entire of which he was able to pay down from past savings. He has two cows and four calves, four large fattening pigs, and 20 sheep, for which he has a run on the mountain, of which he also bought his share. He has raised three acres of oats this year, and it has been a light mountain crop. There have been two acres of potatoes which has been a bad crop. There is no meadow land; and hay is purchased every year for wintering the cattle. This man is evidently well able to weather the storm, and presents a marked contrast to those who have had to get into debt, or to sell their stock, to pay the first instalment. The dwelling is slated and comfortable; the barn is also slated. The cow house is thatched roughly, and the pigs are housed in a lean-to shed. Since the purchase the walls of a stable have been built; but the roof has not been put on.

This man was thrifty long before the purchase was proposed to him.

I asked the son, who is an active fellow, why he had not made a new approach to the premises since he purchased, and his answer was that since the people became owners of their small holdings, they would not give up the width of a pathway. This feeling is natural; but it shows that before sales were effected the wants of the people in matters of this kind should have been fully considered and provided for.

The next house is occupied by No. 6, who, with his wife, was at Newry market with three pigs. He used to work in England. His son, a young fellow of 18, has just returned from it, and barely saved as much money as paid his way. The holding is said to contain 22 acres, chiefly mountain; the rent used to be 6l. 13s. 4d., and the valuation 7l.

Both No. 5 and No. 6 purchased on the 16th October 1875. In the case of No. 6 the purchase money was 154l., or 22 years' purchase on the Poor Law valuation; of this 30l. was paid down.

The house consists of two rooms of the average style. The offices are very bad, and the manure is in a neglected state in front of the dwelling.

There is no evidence of any agricultural improvement having been effected since the purchase.

No. 7 had some 200l. saved before she purchased, and held about six acres at a rent of 4l. 11s., of which the valuation is 4l. She used to have 4 acres of other land. She bought both, and got two indentures from the Church Commissioners, and paid 20l. to a local attorney for costs. In all cases the law costs have been too heavy.

The Commissioners charge 3l. 8s. for preparing and registering a mortgage under 200l., including stamp duty. When the amount secured is over 200l. but under 500l. the charge is 5l. 5s., and so on. The mortgage could have been given for the cost of the stamp. When the purchasers had to borrow, they too frequently went to local solicitors, who took care of themselves.

In one case the rate of interest charged was 25 per cent.

No. 7 says she borrowed 54l. from one of those gentlemen—that she still owes him 14l. or 15l., for which he recently served her with a writ that cost 25s., and that she had to raise 18l. in a loan bank

at a high rate of interest. She regrets bitterly that she ever purchased, and fears she will not be able to keep the land. She was unable to pay the interest due the Commissioners at the appointed time.

She has had two acres of oats this year, and it has turned out fairly. She has had an acre and a road under potatoes, and about half a ten is left. There has been no meadow this year; the grass having been let, except what fed a cow. The live stock consists of a cow and calf.

There was no money to buy the customary pig or two. The land is naturally of fair quality. The house is good and it was built before the purchase. The walls of a barn were also built some years ago, but the roof has not been put on. The family at home consists of a grown up daughter, who is intelligent, two boys of 16 and 15 respectively, and who look downcast, and a young lad who is at school.

There is ample evidence that the entire family are, in their own way, most respectable, well conducted, and deserving. They were in a fair way of living when they were tempted to get into the hands of usurers, who may be said to be the land sharks of the agricultural interests of Ireland, and through whom, we fear, this family became hopelessly involved.

In this case there is a holding which, if properly farmed and managed, would enable the family to live comfortably. But they are weighed down to the ground by heavy instalments and usurious interest.

We asked why they purchased, and the answer may be said to be stereotyped in the minds of the small farmers of Ireland, "Oh! sure, we were afraid of a bad landlord coming over us."

Taking these peasant proprietary holdings as they lay on the route, the next we visited is that of No. 8, whose house, at a distance, looked to be one of the best in the district. The holding contains brought 14 acres; the rent was 13*l.* 10*s.*, the valuation 11*l.* This man had been in Australia, and home upwards of 200*l.*, which he used here in buying up vested interests, stock, &c. on getting married to his wife, whose father held the farm. Of the purchase money, 283*l.*, he paid down 84*l.* 13*s.* 6*d.* This year he has had under potatoes 1*a.* 2*r.*, which has become very light crop; and 5 acres of oats, which was a fair crop. There is no meadow, the rest of the land being grazed. The live stock consists of a horse, two cows, and a calf. The land would carry three cows, but he has been pinched (to use his own words) since the purchase.

He has, for example, parted with things at the wrong time in order to keep credit with the Commissioners.

He says that this year he was noticed to pay earlier than usual, and that he did pay as requested.

The house and offices were built before he acquired the place. He thinks the times and, above all, the instalments, will press him hard.

We think he will hold his ground. All persons who have given attention to the condition of Ireland must be glad to see every facility put in the way of a man of his frugality to acquire a position in which he may be of the greatest use to himself and to society.

It is evident that if this system of treating peasant proprietors is to get a fair trial the instalments must be extended over a large number of years, so that the annual payments should not be much above the old rent.

No. 9 holds 6*a.* 3*r.* 20*p.*, for which he used to pay 4*l.* 2*s.* 8*d.*, and of which the valuation is 5*l.* 3*s.*

The purchase money was 82*l.*, or a fraction under 16 years purchase on the valuation. He also bought, in conjunction with his brother, a mountain run. The local law costs were over 6*l.* on the 82*l.* transaction.

He used to work in England, but he has been employed for the past three years, with his horse, in drawing timber to Newry. Employment is not available for either now. When he purchased he had to sell too much stock to pay his moiety, and he had to borrow as well. He regrets he ever became a peasant proprietor. The roof of the house is very bad. The man does not know how he will meet his engagements and feed his land in spring.

No. 10 holds 13 acres, the rent of which was 8*l.* 18*s.* 6*d.*, and the Poor Law valuation 9*l.* 10*s.* He paid down 50*l.* of the purchase money, which was 198*l.* Of the 50*l.* he borrowed 29*l.* from a local attorney, who impounded his horse, as he calls it, and for which he paid 10*l.*

A poor fellow, No. 11, who used to pay 7*l.* 6*d.* a year rent, paid down 12*l.*, the whole of the purchase money. To do this he sold nine sheep and a pig, and at the present time he has not a beast of any kind.

His house consists of one apartment, and is a wretched structure.

No. 12, of the same name, paid 13*l.* 6*s.* for a rent of 12*s.* a year, and he would have given up were it not for money received from his daughter, who is in America.

In the immediate neighbourhood of Shanroe, Forkhill, in the same county, several other persons purchased their holdings from the Church Commissioners. The first on the list is No. 13, who carries on the principal house of business in the village of Shanroe.

His case may here be disposed of by saying that he built largely and evinced great energy and enterprise long before the Church Act was passed. His rent was 8*l.* 10*s.*, and the valuation 12*l.* 10*s.* The purchase money was 237*l.* He was dealt with most liberally by his former landlords, and he does not complain of the terms offered him by the Church Commissioners.

No. 14 holds 3*a.* 1*r.* for which he used to pay 5*l.* 13*s.*, and of which the valuation is 5*l.* 3*s.* The purchase money was 118*l.* Of this he paid down 82*l.* 4*s.* 10*d.* He purchased on the 1st January 1873. He had money saved at the time and was comfortable. He had, however, to borrow part of the 36*l.* odd at 10 per cent. In paying the last instalment he had to borrow 5*l.* more. The house affords evidence of the man's depressed condition, and he regrets that he ever purchased.

No. 15 holds five acres. The valuation is 4*l.* 10*s.*; the rent was 4*l.* 14*s.* 6*d.* The purchase money was 90*l.*, of which 50*l.* was paid down. He had saved at the time the greater portion of it, but he had to borrow a part; and his indebtedness has increased since. The house presents signs of great distress. The bedroom is wretched. The poor man does not know what will become of him when the few potatoes he has shall have been consumed, as his credit is gone.

His brother, No. 16, who purchased in 1874 his holding of 5½ acres for 110*l.*, has died since. His

son is a servant in Liverpool, and pays the instalments for his mother, who lives in the house with a servant girl, whose wages are 2*l.* in the half year.

No. 17 was in joint occupation of 7*½* *ac.* of land with his late father, at a rent of 6*l.*, when the sale took place, in December 1874. The valuation is 6*l.* 10*s.*, and the purchase money was 12*6* *l.*, of which 3*6* *l.* 4*d.* was paid down. The father has since died, and the son is now in full possession. He has been in the employment of the rector, who lives close by, for about 20 years. At present he is coachman, and gets 8*s.* a week. His wife earns some money by working for the rector's family. The rector has improved the house for him, and it presents a decent appearance.

No. 18 holds 3*½* *ac.* 8*r.*, for which he used to pay 2*l.* 5*s.* The valuation is 8*l.* The purchase money was 47*l.*, the whole of which was borrowed at 10 per cent. He pays the whole of the poor rate, and he paid none before. He stated that none of the purchase money has been repaid. He has a cow (which the poor man described as "a sort of a cow," and which is a very bad sort) and a calf. He has had 3½ roods under potatoes this year, and the produce has been nearly used, and he has had 2 roods of oats, a very fair crop; 2 roods of flax (the seed of which cost 5*s.*, and has to be paid for, with sundry other debts), which is in a very bad state. The house is as bad as it can well be. The kitchen roof is supported by props.

There is no artificial grass or meadow of any kind. There are no roots for the winter feeding of the cow. Nor is there evidence of any attempt whatever at improvement in the cultivation of the land or in the general management of the holding. And these remarks apply to all the holdings described, unless that of the shopkeeper, No. 15, be included.

We shall visit as many of the other peasant proprietors established under the Act in different parts of the country as will enable us to present a reliable view of the whole, and to make a report which we hope may be of public utility.

Whatever may be the condition of these small owners elsewhere, it follows from the foregoing narrative that the indiscriminate sale of their holdings to tenants, on such terms and conditions as those offered by the Commissioners of Irish Church Temporalities, need not be expected to realise the hopes of the advocates of peasant proprietors.

And it is to be remembered that we have selected for our present purpose a county which afforded more than an average share of the conditions for ensuring the success of the system. Armagh is one of the most prosperous counties in Ireland.

It has been regarded as the land of thrift and prosperous small farmers.

It is everywhere intersected by public roads, which, though sometimes hilly, are yet adequate. If the system has broken down in such a county, what may be expected in the remote districts of the west, where vast numbers of the small farmers have no money to pay the instalments, where whole districts want to be opened up by roads, and where the lands are in the most unimproved state? Who is to make the estate roads and arterial drains so essentially required in these districts?

It does not come within our province to answer these questions, but the evidence goes to show that the establishment of peasant proprietors in many parts of Ireland would perpetuate, and in some measure aggravate, existing evils, unless provision be made at the same time for those essential improvements.

An intimation contained in your letter precludes us from dwelling in this report on many important topics to which we should wish to draw attention, but there is one matter on which we must say a few words.

Finding so many of the small farmers of the south and west steeped in debt, misery, and poverty, while their lands are undrained and neglected, we asked why they did not adopt better systems of farming. Thousands upon thousands of them could easily double their incomes by the exercise of skill. We have travelled through entire districts without seeing any men at work in the digging of the ground before the winter's frost, or in preparing the land, as it ought to be prepared at this season, for the coming crops. But the answer to our appeals on both matters was the same; it affords evidence of a conviction which is deeply engraved on the minds of this class, namely, that if they made improvements the rents would be immediately raised in consequence of those improvements.

Now, whatever view be taken of this subject, the feeling remains all the same in the minds of these small farmers, and it is strongest in the most backward and most densely populated districts, and on the estates of land-jobbers, and in those of a few absentees, and other landlords, who do not take the necessary personal interest in the management of their properties.

This feeling would appear to have crushed all spirit of progress and improvement out of the minds of these poor people.

In the whole range of the heads of our inquiry this is the most delicate and difficult subject. It is as significant as it is suggestive that several large landed proprietors in different parts of the country have drawn our attention to the existence of this feeling, and made to us statements which, if true, would fully justify it.

As a rule, the great proprietors have let their lands on the old principle which is expressed by the words, "live and let live." Most of the new landlords, and notably men who made money in trade, or by lending money at high rates of interest, and who brought their old habits to their new position, have acted very differently and have brought landlordism into disrepute.

In the remote parts of Kerry this system has been practised.

Now, on all the great estates that we have visited in that county, we have not been on a single farm where the rent exceeded the poor law valuation by more than 25 per cent. except where old leases fell in.

In most cases yearly tenants pay from 10 to 20 per cent. over the valuation. Close to some of these great estates there are others on which the rents are three, and sometimes four times the valuation.

Passing from Kerry to Connaught, we find a similar state of things. On most of the large estates the rents are, as a rule, not much above the valuation.

But on many of the smaller estates, and on a few of the large ones, the disparity is as great as in the parts of Kerry to which we have referred.

We have in our possession numerous written complaints made by tenants against this class of landlord.

According to one of these complaints, a trader in county Galway "purchased a townland in Connemara a few years ago; the rent was then 65*l*., and it is now 300*l*."

Generally, in these extreme cases (in both Kerry and Connemara) the tenants have reclaimed more or less of the land. A landlord who lets improvable land at a moderate rent may, after the lapse of a reasonable time fairly increase the rent. Indeed, so long as tenancy exists, we hold that the landlord is entitled to the letting value of his land. We do not find that the small farmers object to this; indeed what they object to is the way in which grasping landowners watch their improvements and pounce down upon them, arbitrarily, for an increase of rent, before they have been recompensed for their labour.

In the parts of Ulster where tenant right prevails there is no such disparity between the rent and the poor law valuation as we have found elsewhere. On some of the great estates in Ulster the rents are actually under the valuation. On one estate which we have visited the rental, exclusive of towns, is 57,083*l*., and the valuation is 75,244*l*.

The mere possessory interest in, or tenant right of holdings on, the estate brings high prices in the market.

The Ulster system varies in different parts of the province, and we have found that the action of some landlords in relation to it has caused the most intense excitement.

On many of the great estates the tenants are permitted to dispose of their interest freely, subject to the purchasers being approved by the landlords. On certain estates, for example, in Donegal, whenever a sale takes place, the landlord increases the rent on the new tenant 25 per cent. On visiting a small farm on one of these estates, in the south-west of the county, the tenant complained to us that he and others had been subjected to several increases of rent at short intervals. We give the facts as proved by the receipts he handed to us. In 1831 and 1832 the rent was 4*l*. 13*s*. In 1853 it was raised to 6*l*. 4*s*. (which appears to have been the rent before Free Trade was established). The receipts for some years are missing, but in 1860 the rent was 6*l*. 10*s*. 6*d*. In 1861 it was raised to 7*l*. 15*s*. In 1862, 1863, and 1864 it was 9*l*. In 1865 it was 10*l*. 1*s*. 4*d*. In 1866 and 1867 it was 11*l*. 2*s*. 8*d*. In 1868 it was 11*l*. 17*s*. 11*d*.; and in 1869, 12*l*. 13*s*. 2*d*. We saw the agent, who stated that in 1857 a valuator went over the estate with a view of readjusting the rents, and that this gentleman valued the holding at 12*l*. 13*s*. 2*d*., and that the rent was raised by a series of increments as shown in the receipts. This explanation was never given to the tenant.

We devoted an entire day to an examination of this estate. The agent told us that he has been able to collect very little of this year's rent, and he expressed his belief that the greater number of the tenants are wholly unable to pay it. The tenants on this estate whom we have visited are, like many of those in other localities, in a deplorable state. They are steeped in debt, and their credit is gone.

In conclusion, we venture to express a hope that something may be done to relieve their present wants, and to prevent a recurrence of them.

We have the honour to remain

your obedient servants,

W. A. Peel, Esq.,
Secretary,
Royal Commission on Agriculture.

THOMAS BALDWIN,
C. ROBERTSON,
Assistant Commissioners.

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